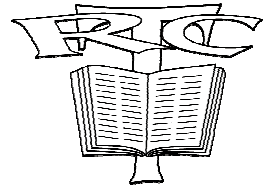


RTC Monthly

No. 34 – 12 August 2009



College News

It's good to see the College student body slowly growing. This semester we have 32 day students and 10 distance students. About half are full-time. Please join us in ongoing prayer for more students. We are praying and working for a student body of 60-80 which would maximise use of our staff and facilities, create a dynamic community of learning and help meet the many ministry needs in our churches.

Preaching OT prophets

The RTC's annual preaching workshop is now only a month away. If you haven't booked for it yet it's not too late and remember that previous workshops have been enjoyed not only by preachers but by elders, people thinking about ministry and church members who just want to get to know God's Word better.

This year's workshop focuses on the 7th century B.C. prophets: Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. Rev. Alastair McEwen and guest speaker Martin Pakula will open these books up to us, along with contributions by Murray Capill and Bill Berends.

Fan the Flame – a new date in 2010

We've decided to change the date for our annual *Fan the Flame* conference. Aimed at raising up future leaders, helping people think about areas of ministry, exposing them to the world of Bible and theological study and giving them a chance to see the College first hand, this conference has been a blessing to over 100 people in its first three years. However with our residence full it is hard to host it in March and it may be more useful to have it later in the year when people are thinking about what the next year will hold. So in 2010 *Fan the Flame* will be held from 4-6 December, Lord willing.

TASK3 plans moving forward

TASK3 is the RTC's new ministry training pathway. It will provide an alternate track to ordained ministry in the CRCA, allowing students to do the first two years of their ministry training in their local church and the second two at the RTC. It will provide a more flexible and practical ministry training option while retaining the academic rigour of a BTh. Combining ministry apprenticeship, distance ed, church-based theological education and on-campus studies, TASK3 will see local churches and the RTC working together closely in ministry training.

We expect TASK3 to be approved by the CRCA later this year and begin in February 2010. People interested in ministry training should talk to their pastor and to the College about this option. And churches keen on training their own people for ministry and local church leadership should consider offering a TASK3 program. For more information, contact the College.

Faculty News

- Steve Voorwinde is on study leave this semester, writing a book on the emotions of Jesus. Please remember him in prayer as he studies and writes, that God may enable him to produce a book that will be a blessing to many. The book will be aimed at a more popular audience than his doctoral dissertation that was on a similar theme.
- This month Murray Capill has been down in Tasmania for ministry at the Kingston CRC and Bill Berends will be heading to WA to speak in a number of churches in Perth. Henk de Waard heads overseas again, but this time it is not for mission work. He and his wife Ria will be enjoying several week's holiday in Europe.

Ministry Spot...

(by Dr Murray Capill)

Effective and powerful ministry goes to the heart. Whether you think of a bible study, a sermon, a counselling session or evangelism, the best ministry is ministry of the Word that impacts people's hearts. That's because the heart, in biblical thinking, is the centre of our being. It is not just the emotional centre, but the centre of our thoughts, actions and affections. It is the core of our being from which everything else flows.

Paul Tripp, in his excellent book, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, helps us think about heart ministry in counselling, but what he says applies much more broadly too. He reminds us that the human heart is not in good shape and right at the heart of our heart problems lies the problem of idolatry. Our hearts were made to love and worship God, but since the fall humans have turned away from God and replaced him with a thousand substitutes. When we turn from God we do not stop worshipping. We can't. We are hard-wired to worship. The human heart is made to reach out beyond itself. So, as G. K. Chesterton said, when people reject God they do not worship nothing, they worship anything. We easily and readily erect idols in our hearts. Calvin rightly said our hearts are "idol factories". We will serve the god of image, or the god of possessions, or the god of sexual lusts, or the god of the stomach, or the gods of pleasure and entertainment – in fact almost anything.

Effective ministry needs to understand and address this compulsive idolatry of the human heart. Tripp reminds us, for example, that we need to understand that idolatry is subtle. Seldom do these idols look like idols. We are not so blatant as to carve idols out of wood and stone. Rather, we carve them out of our passions and desires, subtly moving away from finding our hope, security and purpose in God alone. These subtle idols of the heart can live alongside a seemingly decent Christian life. So subtle can idolatry be that we can even make an idol of gospel ministry, of church growth, or of effective preaching. Idols mostly don't look like idols – they look more like legitimate passions and pursuits. The things we pursue are often not wrong in themselves. The problem is they have assumed a wrongful place in our lives. They have become God-substitutes, so that our sense of well-being, joy and purpose is found in these things rather than in God. No matter how much we confess the right theology, God has been shunted out of central place.

We also need to understand that idols always demand sacrifices. Idols take time, money, focus and attention. As we serve our idol, we cheat God. If money has become our idol, we accumulate wealth and spend lots of time and energy thinking about how to gain and/or spend money, instead of how to invest in the work of the gospel. If entertainment is our god, we spend far too much time watching movies, listening to music and surfing the internet, and far too little time with God. If image is our god, we spend far too much time and focus on how other people perceive us and what they think of us, and far too little time focused on what God thinks of us. Tripp says idolatry is therefore always "moral thievery". It takes from what is rightly God's and gives it to someone or something else.

A third thing about the idols of our hearts that we need to understand is that idols grow. It is very hard to keep an idol down to size! Our appetite for pleasing an idol grows over time. That's why it is so dangerous to give an idol a foothold in your life. Give an idol a millimetre and it will take a kilometre. The guy who begins with a little pornography is soon gripped by it and wants more and more. The woman who finds some solace and comfort in eating, finds that it becomes harder and harder not to eat. Just as God should become greater and greater in our lives, so God-substitutes become greater and greater. Yet if we know the substitutes to be wrong, they will force us to go underground even as we sacrifice to them more and more. We become deceptive, furtive, covert.

One final thing worth noting about idols (though there are many more we could add): they always fail us. Idols promise much but deliver little. Strangely, that is why we go back for more. They don't satisfy. Food doesn't satisfy the deep longings of our heart; neither does golf, or sex, or money, or success. The heart has been made for God, not for lame substitutes. So no matter how much of our idol we get, we never get enough to feel it is really good. The thrill is fleeting. The sense of satisfaction is only momentary. And often the after-taste is appalling. We are left feeling empty and cheated. But the sinful heart is foolish enough to go back for more! We think that next time it will be more satisfying. Or we think that momentary pleasure is enough.

These are heart realities we need to understand – for ourselves and for those to whom we minister. Next time we'll think about how to address idolatry when we minister the Word to others.